

Written Testimony
House Families, Children, and Seniors Committee
HB 5223
May 15, 2012

Chairman Kurtz and Members of the Committee:

My name is Michael Reagan. I am Chief External Relations Officer for Cherry Street Health Services, a provider of health care services including the treatment of substance use disorders in Kent County. I am also a member of the Provider Alliance, a statewide alliance of providers of services to persons with substance use disorders, mental illness, and developmental disabilities.

I am opposed to HB 5223 as it is currently written. This bill requires the Department of Human Services to establish a program of suspicion-based substance abuse screening and testing for family independence program applicants and recipients. If they test positive they are denied benefits. Additionally, applicants are required to pay for testing if they are found to be drug-free. Denying access to benefits for six months, without treatment, for a positive test seems to be counterproductive at best.

HB 5223 would continue the discrimination and negative stigma individuals with substance use disorders face on a daily basis. Substance use disorders are diagnosable and treatable health care conditions, the most serious of which is addiction. Addiction is a chronic brain disorder. Addiction shares many features with other chronic illnesses, such as type II diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease, which tend to run in families and are influenced by one's behavior. The American Medical Association and the World Health organization recognize substance use disorders as health conditions and include substance use addiction as a chronic illness. In fact, according to the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) most recent definition:

Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.

Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control and craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death. (ASAM, April 2012 Public Policy Statement: Definition of Addiction).

Substance use disorders can be a significant barrier to productive roles in our community. Punishing the person with the disorder does not result in any positive benefit to our state. If the

State of Michigan is really concerned about reducing the harm from substance use disorders and effectively assisting families, there are interventions that can be matched effectively to the severity of the person's substance use disorder. These interventions can move well beyond just testing and punishing.

These better practice interventions can include the following. When tested positive the person can be required to have a professional assessment and a treatment or intervention recommendation based upon this individualized assessment. The person is then given the choice of following through with this assessment or facing other negative consequences. Many employers can and do follow a similar practice in certain circumstances established through their Employee Assistance Programs, when they find an employee with an alcohol or drug problem which has manifest itself in the workplace. Employers recognize that substance use disorders are health care problems and that they are treatable. Providing and incenting the person to treatment is the much more promising path to productive roles in our community; and not the punishment and automatic exclusion from benefits that this bill proposes.

HB 5223 does not allow for a positive outcome for individuals and their families. Addressing substance use issues directly when identified is much more cost effective in the long term than any short term gained from this legislation. Denying someone assistance because of a positive drug test does not mean that the persons in need will just go away. Jails and hospitals will see additional cases of those with untreated substance use disorders, which end up being more costly for the state. Furthermore, substance use disorders are one of the leading barriers to employment for many individuals. It would be far more beneficial and cost effective to offer treatment to individuals as opposed to cutting them off.